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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

On the September 27 Daily Brief, you commented that the Department of Defense should not carry deaths resulting from helicopter collision under the battle casualty column. We have discussed this issue with the Department of Defense and are informed that purely operational losses of this type are not carried as battle casualties but are reported in a separate category.

When death occurs due to an accidental or operational mishap, it is not included in the weekly total of battle deaths but reported as an operational casualty. There are, of course, many gray areas which have resulted in the development of a detailed set of criteria which must be met before a death is categorized as due to battle or due to operational causes. For example, on numerous occasions it is difficult to know whether a loss is a result of enemy action or operational failure. In these instances careful investigation criteria must be met before a determination is made.

As you can well imagine there is a serious morale issue involved, especially in the case of aircraft losses. Many times enemy ground fire could result in the crash landing of a fighter plane on a carrier deck or the disappearance of an aircraft on a combat mission. It is important for the morale of our pilots and crewmen that where genuine doubt exists that they be carried as battle casualties and not operational losses. Within these constraints, I have been assured by Secretary Laird that operational or accidental losses have not and will not be carried in weekly battle casualty totals.

OSD Review Completed

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE  
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

AMH:wgh:9 October 1970

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